Antiretroviral Time: Gay Sex, Pornography, and Temporality 'post-Crisis'

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Abstract

The introduction of combination antiretroviral therapies in 1996 brought about a radical change in the temporality of HIV infection, moving us away from the event-time of the AIDS crisis to the expanded/expansive temporality of chronic 'undetectability'. That, and the later extension of antiretrovirals as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, has dramatically shifted the lived temporalities of both sex and subjectivity among gay men who were able to access the new medical protocols for testing, managing, and preventing HIV. In this essay, I draw from field work carried out in Berlin, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and analysis of gay pornography, to map the new temporalities of sex and subjectivity that have been catalysed by the introduction of antiretroviral drugs, speculating on their limits and queer political potential, situated as they are at the intersection of neoliberal regimes of biomedical self-administration and sex understood as both an aesthetics and poetics of existence. If modernity developed through an incessant rationalisation of time, including of lived, embodied time, I argue that antiretroviral time has triggered the emergence of sexual behaviours and subjectivities that open up new avenues for thinking 21st-century triangulations of sex, subjectivity, and resistance being experimented with in bedrooms, sex clubs, and bathhouses across the developed world.

Keywords: HIV, antiretrovirals, masculinity, bareback, temporality, biopolitics

Berlin, 2019

It was March in Berlin, a Sunday morning. Having had breakfast with 'Ed,' we headed to one of the German capital's many gay club nights, famous for being all-weekend non-stop events where dancing and public sex are welcomed under the same roof. A couple of hours after we arrived, caught up with friends and danced, we decided to check what was going on in the club's darkroom. Inside, several men were having sex with one another, most if not all of them without condoms. As we stayed there, engaging in different ways and to different degrees with the men in the room, I

registered the occasional friendly chatter, the exchange of partners, and the extremely guttural nature of the sexual noises those men were making. Some of them, whom I had seen outside earlier, sounded like they had dropped their voices by an octave upon entering the room, their body language having also stiffen to a very different posture and choreography to the ones they had maintained whilst dancing outside. In the darkroom, shoulders were kept fixed and hips were only allowed very precise thrusting movements. As we eventually moved out to the garden to smoke a cigarette, the occasional half naked man would come out of the building with his fast-moving eyes, intense sexual demeanour, and noticeable erection denouncing the levels of gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid (GHB), Viagra and – likely – other substances they had been taken. I could hear some of those men talking about having been out all weekend, and about the sex they had had in the darkroom, in a manner that hovered between braggadocio and sudden realisation that it was now Sunday and they were still out. Inside, as the sound of techno, house, and disco continued to mould the time of ecstasy, a group of volunteers from a sexual health NGO (non-government organisation) gave information to punters on risk-management of sex and drugs, on STIs (sexually transmitted infections), and on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), and Treatment-as-Prevention (TasP), antiretroviral cocktail regimes to tackle potential or actual HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection.

Los Angeles, 2019

It was April in Silverlake, a Sunday morning. Having used a gay hook-up app to meet a guy for a sex date, I got ready and waited by the front window, looking at the street below for him to arrive. As he eventually entered my field of vision, the familiar sight of his rather large and full backpack hinted at the likely rhythm of the weekend he had been going through. Having opened him the door, we started chatting as we moved to the bedroom. He seemed like a friendly and relaxed guy. Also, a very attractive one. As we got to the bedroom, he promptly opened his backpack to pick up a cock ring and a bottle of poppers. Glancing into the backpack, I could see drugs paraphernalia

recognisable by many 21st-century gay men: a bag of cotton buds, various injection kits including needles and syringes, cleaning wipes, hand sanitiser, a bottle of pharmaceutical alcohol, changes of clothes, a bottle of Truvada, and two or three small boxes the contents of which I couldn't see but guessed to be recreational drugs. He, my sex date, asked me whether I 'partied,' an expression used amongst gay men as shorthand for 'party and play' or 'PnP' – the consumption of recreational drugs during sexual encounters, what is also commonly known as 'chemsex.' It turns out he had spent the previous few days 'slamming' – that is, injecting – crystal metamphetamine or 'Tina' whilst having sex with various other men in their homes. I politely declined his offer – something he was totally fine with – and we had sex for an hour or so whilst playing porn on my computer. Once we finished, he thanked me for having allowed him to 'cum' as otherwise he would have had to go on to another guy's place – it was already late morning on a Sunday and he should be going home as he had been out for a couple of days. He grabbed various toiletry products he was carrying in his backpack – hand sanitiser, toothpaste, toothbrush, mouthwash, shower gel – and asked me to use the bathroom. As I was waiting in the adjacent bedroom, I suddenly heard him shout 'oh fuck!'. Asked what had happened, he replied 'I've just realised I've missed my flight to New York to attend my best friend's wedding this afternoon!'.

Antiretroviral Time

The two vignettes with which I opened this essay illustrate, in slightly different ways, what I intend to explore in what follows. Namely, the ways in which 21st-century gay male subjectivities are being shaped and mediated by a cocktail of antiretroviral drugs, recreational drugs, and pornographic media, all coalescing to create and sustain a dilated form of sex time that is no longer necessarily lived or even conceived as a linear teleological progression towards orgasm but is instead experienced as a pulsating, ecstatic plateau of heightened bodily sensations and unproductive expenditure. It is that lived and embodied form of contemporary time that I'm calling antiretroviral time, and it is one that, as I will argue, raises some important questions concerning the

body, pleasure, subjectivity, and temporality vis-à-vis neoliberal rationality and chronobiopolitics. To make this argument, I will draw from contemporary gay pornography, fieldwork, and from a conversation I had with Paul Morris, owner of gay porn studio Treasure Island Media, in San Francisco in the Spring of 2019.

Formally announced in 1996 at the XI International AIDS Conference in Vancouver, combination antiretroviral therapies – cocktails of three different antiretroviral drugs for the management of HIV infection – catalysed a radical change in the ways in which the temporality of HIV was understood. In the 1980s and early 1990s, during the peak of the so-called 'AIDS Crisis' in what is oftentimes known as the 'global North' – a geopolitical formation heir to the history of European capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, and marked by a 'transnationalization of suffering' (Sousa Santos 2014: 10) – HIV and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) diagnoses were lived as life-changing biomedical events. They forced a refocus of one's own self-narrative on the progression of one's life towards certain and, most likely, painful death and social ostracisation – the unescapable ticking clock of AIDS. With the introduction of combination antiretroviral therapies, and thanks to their promise of turning HIV infection into a manageable life-long condition, the time of HIV infection morphed into a new form of embodied temporality defined by the never-ending present of chronicity. Such new experience of temporality would then also deeply change the sense of self – the 'intrapsychic scripts' as it were (Simon and Gagnon 1986) – of people living with HIV. If able to access the new drug protocols now known as Treatment as Prevention (TasP), those of us living with HIV had now to reconfigure our whole sense of time no longer around the certainty of an AIDS-related death, but around a sense of temporal suspension – the temporality of suspended infection, of dormant copies of HIV trapped in our brains and lymph nodes. In the 21st century, the time of HIV became marked by the recursive tempo of a daily dose of combination antiretroviral drugs. With a queer form of temporality that required from gay men 'a long-term commitment to "living in the present",' the new antiretroviral drugs 'altered the

experience of normality and normative temporality' for those who had to start taking them if they wanted to survive (Race forthcoming).

When, in 2012, the USA's FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approved the use of combination antiretroviral drugs also for pre-exposure prophylaxis of HIV (PrEP), that same temporal shift towards antiretroviral time reached those of us who remained HIV-negative. It is important to note that, whether or not gay men were infected with HIV, we had all been living with the virus, either as an actual infection or as the ghost of a future-presence that would always haunt our every sexual encounter. Between the 1980s and the early 21st-century, gay men – particularly those who, like me, were born in the early years of the epidemic – developed their identity and sexual subjectivities vis-à-vis HIV. Because of the ways in which the virus had been associated with gay male populations, and even if that narrative would eventually be debunked, the late 20th century was a time of fear, a time when the future was not only certain but it could likely also deliver us our worst nightmare in the shape of a lethal form of intimacy. Today, as TasP and PrEP are becoming increasingly accessible around the world, either through public health programmes or – for those who can afford them – private health insurance schemes, gay men are freeing themselves from the narrative that used to tie together our sex and our pleasures with HIV and AIDS.

As combination antiretroviral regimes became more available and the fear of HIV withered away, increasing numbers of gay men have stopped using condoms, and barebacking – that is, condomless anal sex – became mainstream in both 21st-century gay sexual encounters and gay pornography (Dean 2009, Tomso 2008, Lee 2014, Florêncio 2018, 2020, Bersani and Phillips 2008). At the same time, other drug cocktails gained popularity amongst gay men – cocktails of recreational drugs such as crystal metamphetamine, ketamine, GHB, mephedrone, etc., which many gay men use to enhance the sensations and pleasures of sex and to achieve longer and heightened sex drives, whether in gay sex clubs or in private homes to where other men are invited through mobile gay hook-up apps (Mowlabocus 2010, Hakim 2019). In that context, one in which

biomedical technologies, recreational drugs, contemporary sex media, and locative mobile technologies are all coalescing to create the conditions of possibility for new forms of gay male intimacy to develop, gay male subjectivities themselves are undergoing a transformation, a transformation of the self that, I contend, is inseparable from the newly-discovered temporality of HIV chronicity.

In her book *Enduring Time*, Lisa Baraitser (2017) carries out a sophisticated and attentive analysis of 21st-century experiences of time. She argues that, unlike the linear and teleological time of Fordist modernity and the certainty with which it promised to deliver us a better future, contemporary Post-Fordist temporality is marked, on the one hand, by the subjugation of all our time to the logics of work – of profit, of targets, of performance, of efficiency, and capitalisation – and, on the other, by a very tangible experience of time having been suspended and thus not passing. Despite the various ways in which, today, we live with a sense of catastrophe always about to happen – financial, ecological, geopolitical, etc – the reality according to Baraitser (2017) is that at a psychosocial level, we're more likely to experience time as '"unbecoming" time – time that is lived as radically immovable, experiences of time that aren't just slow, sluggish or even interminable in the sense of Heidegger's account of boredom, but are radically suspended, "a great circle with no rim"' (4). Arguing that we need a conception of time that is different from both Alain Badiou's 'event' and Gilles Deleuze's 'becoming,' predicated as they both were on a paradigm of change either through rupture (Badiou) or motion as first ontology (Deleuze), Baraitser notes that, whilst indeed transformation and vitality may have aided us to understand change, they are of little use in helping us frame quintessentially contemporary experiences of time. For, unlike rupture or motion, time is today more likely to be experienced as 'waiting, staying, delaying, enduring, persisting, repeating, maintaining, preserving and remaining' (11–13). Moreover – and this is why Baraitser's argument is so useful in the context of what I'm calling antiretroviral time – her interest in contemporary experiences of suspended time is also driven by an investment in investigating 'the potential for transcending the immanence of our own historical moment in precisely the places that

it looks simply impossible to happen, and to understand this transcendence in terms of something [she's] calling "care"' (14).

For Baraitser, unlike less optimistic authors who've made a similar diagnosis of contemporary experiences of suspended time (for example, Osborne 2013, Fisher 2009, 2018), it is by inhabiting what Eric Cazdyn called 'the new chronic,' describing it as the 'dull soreness of a meantime with no end' (Cazdyn quoted in Baraitser 2017: 3), that practices of 'remaining' or 'care without end' (183) may have the potential to disrupt the neoliberal chrononormativity of creative production, cost/benefit analyses, and competition. In Baraitser's words:

> I've tried throughout to apprehend the way that remaining is itself a form of care. Perhaps, more precisely … a form of 'care without ending' – that is, maintaining, preserving, waiting, delaying, staying, recalling, remaining *as* practices of care that emerge in response to punishment without ending, political stasis without ending, dependency without ending, grief without ending, memory without ending, and the permanent disaster of capitalism without ending. 'Care without ending' paradoxically relies on the capacity to stay in relation to an elongated present, to bear the embarrassment of anachronism, the dynamic chronicity of the death drive, the overwhelming effects of the present-tense of intergenerational difference, to decide to know the unbearable, to grasp time, and in doing so, to take care of time. (183)

Following on from that, then, *Enduring Time* argues that, rather than fighting against the miasma of a never-ending present by calling on or wishing for a future that increasingly *feels* deferred, to wilfully embrace the temporality of a suspended present may offer us an alternative to the rationality of neoliberal time. Just like, for Jacques Lacan, the 'ethical act' allowed for the Law and the Symbolic to return in a more liveable manner (see Ruti 2017: 112–114, also Lacan 2008), in Baraitser's psychoanalytically-informed reading, chronicity becomes 'the only condition for

newness, where newness is neither breach, rupture or flash, but a quiet noticing that something remains, which is the permanent capacity to begin again' (2017: 188). Modern clock time did not simply regulate activity in disciplinary institutions such as the factory or the prison, but it also inaugurated a new form of subjectivity – the modern liberal subject – through regulation of the patterns and temporalities internal to the life of individual bodies and their relationships with one another – a chronobiopolitics of chrononormativity (Luciano 2007, Freeman 2010, 2019, see also Foucault 1995). As a development of such modern regulation of bodies, neoliberalism emerged in the late 20th Century as a form of biopolitical rationality whereby the government of bodies was devolved from institutions to individuals who are today interpellated to self-administer and self-regulate in order to constantly improve themselves, to be healthy, and to achieve their potential. As Miguel de Beistegui (2018) argued, 'under the neoliberal paradigm, […[freedom is not the ultimate goal of government, but that through which a specific way of governing—the way that sees every subject as *homo economicus*, in charge of his or her human capital and responsible for his or her own promotion and self-esteem—is implemented' (2011). Yet, the expanded temporalities of chronicity that make up the contemporary psychosocial experiences of time explored by Baraitser seem to point to the existence of alternative forms of embodied temporality that are lived alongside the neoliberal compulsion to self-development and growth, therefore creating the conditions of possibility for new political subjectivities to emerge. One of the specific contexts in which that phenomenon is taking place – and the one I'm interested in – is the development of new forms of gay male subjectivities and sexual sociabilities that are being catalysed by antiretroviral time and mediated by contemporary gay pornography.

Fucking without Ending

As a complex register of the sex cultures of our time (see Kipnis 1999, Paasonen 2011), contemporary pornography has started to reflect recent changes in gay male subjectivities, sexual behaviours, and sexual sociabilities, offering us an important set of cultural references to theorise

gay sex in the age of antiretrovirals. Gay porn has, since the turn of the 21st century, undergone a series of stylistic and formal transformations that, I argue, resonate with the expanded temporalities of lived gay sex and gay male subjectivities catalysed by PrEP and TasP. Through those, gay porn has begun mediating an alternative temporality of sex, whereby fucking now tends to be presented as an activity that takes place without ending, where 'ending' should be understood here as both the end of each sexual encounter and the end of gay lives due to AIDS. While the AIDS crisis triggered an exponential investment in negative affects and temporalities amongst a substantial number of queer scholars in the late 20th and early 21st centuries – through a focus on the death drive (Bersani 1987, 1996, Dean 2008), a rejection of the future (Edelman 2004, 2009), an attachment to loss and the past (Love 2007), a politicisation of abjection (Halperin 2007), or a reading of queerness as failure (Halberstam 2011) – contemporary gay porn began to associate gay sex with alternative temporalities and constellations of affects. In today's gay porn, temporality and affects increasingly veer away not only from negativity but also from all univocal, linear, and teleological approaches to the unfolding of time, as well as from the certainty with which the latter anticipate the arrival of a supposedly predetermined future they see gestating in the present.

As I aim to elucidate in what follows, the sex that we increasingly see portrayed in gay porn eschews the traditional structures of narrative porn in order to deny viewers a clear and formally demarcated end of the sex scenes. It also shows gay men engaging in behaviours that would, only three decades ago, be seen as life-threatening but which, today, can no longer be reduced to the negative pull of the death drive. Instead, those behaviours are presented as life-affirming practices that open up to a future the coordinates of which are still unknown. In order to explore those two ways in which contemporary gay porn puts forward a new temporality of fucking without ending, I would like to start by focusing on the obituary gay writer Jack Fritscher wrote on the occasion of the passing of his friend, the artist and illustrator Al Shapiro, also known as A. Jay.

Accompanying a condolences card dated 16 July 1987 and sent to Dick Kriegmont – Shapiro's partner – Jack Fritscher, founding editor of US gay leather magazine *Drummer*, enclosed

the manuscript of the obituary he had written for Shapiro and which would appear in issue 107 of *Drummer* later that August. Shapiro, who had been the founding art director for the magazine and the creator of its erotic cartoon series *Harry Chess* and *Pecs O'Toole*, had died a couple of months earlier on the 30 May due to AIDS-related health complications. At the end of his obituary, Fritscher recalls reading the preface of his new book to Shapiro, to whom he had dedicated the work, soon before his death. One passage of that preface, which Fritscher quoted at length in the obituary, encapsulates the experience of time that had become a defining feature of gay male subjectivities in the late 1980s. It reads:

> … with so much death this side of Venice, the world gives little safe access anymore to unbridled Desire, but Desire's memory burns in my heart and mind. I know, I swear I know, despite the growing rolls of the dead, the world has not heard of the end of us. If and when the last one of us lies dying in some fluorescent hospital, I guarantee, I do, I do affirm, the last sound he will hear, echoing from down the long corridor, the sound that will cheer his ears and his valiant heart, will be the first cry of a brand-spanking neonate, a new little baby boy born as were we, gifted innately with our special ways of love, and in him, in that boy child, our kind will find a new Adam and begin the beguine all over again. (Fritscher 1987: 13–14)

To Fritscher, reflecting on the passing of his close friend, lived time had been marked by the falling of bodies to AIDS and the consequent nostalgia for a time of 'unbridled desire.' It had become the time when fucking had been leading us to an ending, to our ending. Yet, amidst all that death and loss, Fritscher still maintained hope in the certainty of a future that would keep on bringing into life the forms of queer love and life that AIDS had insisted in stealing. In so doing, he hinted at a form of futurity that, complicating Lee Edelman's (2004) antisocial thesis, saw in the chrononormativity of reproductive futurism and of the latter's grounding of politics on the figure of a Child to come,

the possibility of that same child being one of us, a queer child defiantly born out of the heteronormative compulsion to reproduce. For Fritscher, the sound of that new screaming 'boy child' would reassure the dying that the future of our kind would not cease unfolding.

Over three decades later, the temporality of HIV has suffered a radical change. In the late 1980s, when Fritscher was writing his obituary of Al Shapiro, 'unbridled' homosexual desire had come to be seen as a vector of death and been relegated to the space of memory and nostalgia. Today, at the start of the 2020s, 'unbridled' desire, as well as its visual representations, appear to have returned with a vengeance and no longer associated with death, thanks to the molecular biopolitics of antiretrovirals and their ability to extend life either by preventing HIV infection or by halting its progression to AIDS.

Consider, for instance the production of San Francisco-based porn studio Treasure Island Media (TIM). Founded in the late 1990s, TIM was the first production company to build subcultural status as a porn studio fully dedicated to bareback sex. Amongst its various infamous videos, which have led to many words being written both in the popular press and in academic volumes (see, for example, Dean 2009, McNamara 2013, McCasker 2014, Morris and Paasonen 2014, Scott 2015), titles such as *What I Can't See* (1999), *Dawson's 20-Load Weekend* (2004), *Viral Loads* (2014), or *So You Wanna Be a Cumdump?* (2015) are examples of the studio's documentary house style, one which increasing numbers of new and older studios have started replicating. TIM's videos and marketing campaigns embrace both the style of documentary and an aesthetics of transgression in seeking to portray increasingly 'extreme' sexual fantasies of rough condomless sex, often giving the impression that their models have fully surrendered to their darkest desires (see, for example, Dean 2009, Edelman 2009, Lee 2014, Florêncio 2018, Morris and Paasonen 2014, 2019). Yet, it is on the temporality of their narrative that I'd like to focus here, for – alongside the various techniques used for making internal ejaculations visible (see, for example, Dean 2009, Scott 2015) – it constitutes one of the most radical breaks with the syntax of gay video pornography produced before and throughout the peak years of the AIDS crisis in the so-called 'global North' (1981–1996).

Most gay porn scenes produced before and during the AIDS crisis had a linear narrative which often started with a formulaic beginning. That included genre tropes such as a delivery man arriving at an apartment, an employee arriving for meeting with manager, a gardener or swimming pool cleaner hooking-up with man sunbathing by the pool, prison inmates asserting hierarchy through sex, footballers playing with one another in the secrecy of locker rooms, etc. Those initial shots, central to the framing of the who, where, and when of the sexual fantasy, could thus be read through the logics of narrative and number that Linda Williams famously claimed to be shared by genres as apparently diverse as pornography and musicals. According to that logics, 'narrative informs [sexual] number, and number, in turn, informs narrative' (Williams 1999: 131). Yet, unlike the earlier porn genres discussed by Williams, the gay porn scenes produced after the advent of the internet and at the start of the 21st century began dropping the initial narrative framing in order to start *in media res* – in the middle of the action – often with no context provided as to who the men were and how they met. To a certain extent, the affordances of online media and particularly its rhythms of viewing can partially help explain such change (see Paasonen 2011). Yet, for Paul Morris, owner of Treasure Island Media, when it comes to his studio, cutting straight to the sexual action had to do with a desire to simply better document the sex that real men were really having, thus avoiding the hyper-stylised fictional environments that, to him, had dominated mainstream gay porn in the late 20th-century, the artificiality of which had also been synecdochically stressed by the presence of condoms (Morris 2011).

Within such context, porn videos deprived of a traditionally scripted narrative and comprising only sexual numbers – like operas made only of arias – have become dominant features of contemporary gay production as exemplified by the output not just of TIM but also of other studios like Hung Young Brit, Raw Fuck Club, Pig-Prod or Machofucker, as well as of the more recent subscription platforms dedicated to user-uploaded pornographic content such as OnlyFans.com or Justfor.Fans. Beyond producing a higher sense of authenticity, allowing for shorter videos more suitable for the attention spans of online media consumption, and being more

efficient if one bears in mind their primary aim is to aid the sexual self-gratification of its online viewers, the new form of gay pornography also tends to frame each scene as if it were a mere section of time preceded by nothing and followed by nothing – a slice of a never-ending present of sexual play and pleasure. Such a sense of a never-ending sexual present is further intensified by the emergence of the gang bang (sex scenes in which multiple tops penetrate a single bottom) as the paradigmatic number in contemporary condomless gay porn. In gang bangs, the temporality lived by the bottom can be read as a never-ending present of never-ending penetration and intake of ejaculate, where the present keeps on returning with every new dick. This eternal return of penetration and internal ejaculation troubles the heretofore established view according to which the male cum shot was the telos of sex and, thus, the diegetic climax of standard pornographic sequences – a view famously posited by Linda Williams (1999, see also Aydemir 2007).

Such a sense of a returning present and, therefore, of deferred closure is also further stressed by the increasingly standard expansion of the scene well beyond the last cum shot. Today, and unlike earlier videos, the primacy of the cum shot as the temporal anchor and narrative telos of porn is also disrupted by the increasingly common continuation of penetration beyond ejaculation, and by the subsequent exchange of ejaculate amongst the participating models – from rectum to mouth, from mouth to mouth to mouth, etc. Both penetration beyond ejaculation and cum exchange among tops and bottoms deny the cum shot its Phallic role as the final cause of both gay sex and gay pornography.

Contemporary gay porn's investment in a suspended present was the topic of one of several long afternoon conversations I had with Paul Morris at the headquarters of Treasure Island Media in San Francisco in the Spring of 2019. Having spent some time talking to me about queer temporality, using as examples Francis Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra (1932) and gamelan music, that one afternoon, and as we were discussing the debates over negativity and relationality that marked queer studies in the early 2000s (Edelman 2004, Muñoz 2009), Morris decided to take me through the music video for Kylie Minogue's 2001 song 'Can't Get You Out of

My Head.' While I did not have the chance to record our conversations, my field notes for that day highlight Morris's understanding, contra José Muñoz, of queer time as a time of the present. If, for Muñoz (2009), queerness was a 'mode of desiring that allows us to see beyond the quagmire of the present' (1), for Morris it has instead to do with a full embrace of the latter. That sense of a never-ending present – of suspended time – was, to him, embodied in the base line of Minogue's song: a melodically and harmonically simple short phrase played in a loop throughout the whole song and functions as the grounds on which everything else happens. According to Morris, when seen under that light, Minogue's song is not radically different from Poulenc's own piano suite *Mouvements Perpétuels* (1918), and that goes a long way to explain why both Minogue and Poulenc have become gay icons, for gay men recognise themselves in the temporality enacted in the patterns of their melodic and harmonic repetitions. Moreover, the rhythmic pattern of 'Can't Get You Out of My Head' is also, in Morris's analysis, mirrored in the music video itself. In it, Minogue drives a car across a generic and deserted 21st-century cityscape. Eventually, there is a cut to the singer who is seen singing and dancing first on a rooftop and then in what looks like a waiting room. In both occasions, she is accompanied by a group of dancers who move to a choreography of small, repetitive and quasi-robotic gestures with no clear progression or resolution. In the music video, just like in the song, and just like in most of the pornographic output of Paul Morris and Treasure Island Media, nothing really happens in the classical sense of narrative because time does not ever flow. Instead, time is approached as a present that never ends. As Kylie sings in the third stanza of her song: 'Every night / every day / just to be there in your arms / Won't you stay / Won't you lay / Stay forever and ever and ever.'

A queer rejection of the chrononormativity of modernity and of the chronobiopolitics of the neoliberal self-entrepeneurship is thus, for Paul Morris after Francis Poulenc and Kylie Minogue, enacted through what, to him, is a life-affirming life dedication to living in the present. According to his view, the future is to be rejected as the time in which one will have grown and improved oneself, freeing the present for never-ending, chronic pleasure. Today, the 'unbridled Desire'

mourned by Jack Fritscher in 1987 has returned with increased magnitude as a result of the temporal affordances of both antiretroviral and recreational drugs (with their ability to extend lived time and dodge exhaustion), and 21st-century sex media (with their ability to depict time rescued from the linear teleological unfoldings of narrative and to present us with a never-ending flow of sex scenes to click on or scroll through). Of course, that sense of an eternally-expandable present of never-ending pleasure hits against the material limitations of actual bodies which can't – for the time being at least – keep on fucking forever. And, of course, such a temporal imaginary is also a highly mediated and commodified fantasy, just like the sex we see in porn. Yet, fantasies are always lived constellations of bodies, temporalities, imaginaries, and desires that play an important role in shaping the meanings we give to our contemporary bodies, to our time, and to ourselves. As such, they also have the potential to loosen open new pathways for speculation on the plasticity of our bodies, of our time, and of ourselves – for creatively thinking them otherwise. Under those conditions, antiretroviral time has gifted us an imaginary of the present as the time of fucking without ending.

To Fuck Now

Critical writings on the biopolitics of PrEP (for example, Race 2009, Dean 2015, Preciado 2015) have tended to think the development of antiretroviral regimes for the prophylaxis of HIV in relation to the contemporary neoliberal rationality according to which individual subjects are expected to take responsibility for the self-management of their own lives (see Beistegui 2018). If Michel Foucault's critique of modern biopolitics saw the latter as a set of techniques for the rational government of bodies and populations through medical discourse and demographics (see, for example, Foucault 1978, 1983, 2003) – a disciplining process that was inseparable from the co-construction of sexuality and race in colonial societies (see Stoler 2002, Morgensen 2010, 2011) – contemporary neoliberal biopolitics instead individualises the locus of power. It makes individuals responsible for their biopolitical self-administration, guaranteeing the reproduction of human capital

and thus the extension of the logics of the market – competition, efficiency, investment, and return – to every single aspect of our individual lives. It does so by interpellating us to look after ourselves, to be fit, to be healthy, to look good, to speak our truth, to succeed, etc. (see Beistegui 2018). If the framework of somatechnics is "an attempt to highlight the inextricability of soma and techné, of "the body" […] and the techniques […] in and through which corporealities are formed and transformed' (Sullivan and Murray 2009: 3), writers such as Tim Dean (2015), Kane Race (2009 2016, 2018), Karsten Schubert (2019) and others have discussed the biopolitical dimensions of recent shifts in HIV public health protocols, reflecting on the kinds of corporealities and subjectivities that are today being forged by antiretroviral means. As Race (2016) notes, thanks to the introduction of combination antiretroviral regimes, 'sexual practice no longer constitutes the exclusive target of HIV prevention initiatives' and thus 'the prospect of pharmaceutically mediated viral suppression makes it possible to dislodge gay desires for sex without condoms from their cultural associations with willful self-destruction' (12). Such a biomedical untying of the knot that used to connect condomless sex with death becomes significant for thinking contemporary gay male corporealities and subjectivities in their material, political, and symbolic dimensions.

However, those authors' positions vis-à-vis the biopolitics of antiretrovirals and PrEP in particular aren't consensual. Dean (2015) sees combination antiretroviral therapies as ultimately a form of biopolitical governance. According to him, antiretrovirals mask the pursuit of intimacy and self-shattering jouissance that, from his particular psychoanalytical vantage point at least, constitutes the irrational fundamental truth of sex. Further, to him, the new pharmaceutical protocols for management and prophylaxis of HIV, in molecularising and individualising the management of life, have also become the newest neoliberal step in the long history of the biopolitical medicalisation of gay sexuality (see also Preciado 2013).

Race (2016, 2018), on the other hand, draws from the patchy uptake of PrEP amongst gay men, as well as from the various negative moral responses and sex panics PrEP has triggered, to complicate Dean's reading. To him, PrEP is a 'reluctant object: an object that may well make a

tangible difference to people's lives, but whose promise is so threatening or confronting to enduring habits of getting by in this world that is provokes aversion, avoidance – even condemnation and moralism' (Race 2016: 17). By showing how responses to PrEP both among gay men and in the wider society have been everything but straightforward, and how PrEP has not been received 'as though [it] were an object that rational folks cannot but want' (18), Race disputes Dean's reduction of PrEP to the rationality of neoliberal governance. Within a context of 'condom habit' in which condoms have been deployed to, to a certain extent, '*exempt* oneself from a repeated and traumatic interpellation by risk discourse,' for Race (2016) 'PrEP is likely to materialize as both a threatening proposition and a challenging one' (21). The reason for that is that PrEP 'asks HIV-negative men not only to *acknowledge* but also take systematic, prescribed, coordinated, and involved action against a risk that one may not be inclined to acknowledge so readily' (Race 2016: 23). In short, whilst Dean (2015) sees PrEP as an attempt to rationalise sex, Race (2016) sees it as a biopolitically-complicated drug regime that, in being offered to gay men, forces us to acknowledge the irrationality of sex and, in so doing, betrays our familiar 'desire to position risk as an *exception* rather than a tendency' (24).

More recently, Schubert (2019) has surveyed the field of critical scholarship on the biopolitics of PrEP and offered his own nuanced reading of how PrEP operates on a biopolitical level by attending to the various ways in which gay men and public health professionals relate to PrEP, the inequality in access to it, and its relationship to Big Pharma. Further, by drawing from the work of Nikolas Rose and Paul Rabinow, Schubert tried to 'better understand the complexities of the politics around PrEP' in a way that more comprehensively 'accounts for the bioeconomic interests of pharma companies, the discursive shifts towards medicalization in the health sector, and the agency of and complex interconnections between professionals, users, patients, and activist [*sic*]' (142). To him, the politics of PrEP thus ought to be seen as a form of democratic politics for, unlike 'classical deliberative democratic theories, which exclude unreason,' the politics of PrEP 'confirm democratic theories which argue that democratic reasoning depends on processing and

deliberating its other, unreason or irrationality' (143). Whilst Dean (2015) saw PrEP as a top-down technology for the administration of life, and Race (2016) highlighted the reluctant manner in which PrEP was received by gay men, Schubert (2019) calls for an acknowledgement that desire is never a given but is always-already shaped by biopolitical technologies. He therefore asks for a higher level of inclusion of PrEP users in public health decision-making, and for a 'renegotiation and minimization of costs and profits in the health sector' in order to increase access to those drugs (143). These and other ongoing debates highlight the double nature of PrEP as somatechnics, that is, 'the "doubleness" of techné as simultaneously constitutive and critical, as the dynamic materialisation of becoming and unbecoming' of corporealities (Sullivan and Murray 2009: 4).

In what remains of this text, I would like to add to that debate by focusing more strongly on the chronobiopolitics of antiretroviral drugs, whether they are taken as PrEP or TasP. Doing so will, I believe, further complicate – and thus further elucidate – the biopolitical dimensions of HIV drugs. In my view, whilst certainly instituting neoliberal rationality, combination antiretroviral protocols can nonetheless also create conditions of possibility for a veering away from that very same rationality, by opening bodies to the irrationality of sex and desire. Furthermore, if, as Elizabeth Freeman (2019) argued following Foucault, the development of modern subjectivity involved a fundamental rationalisation of the rhythms of life and of the body, considerations of the biopolitics of antiretrovirals ought to also take into account the temporal dimensions of PrEP and TasP – the ways in which combination antiretroviral regimens catalyse the experience of what I've been calling antiretroviral time. In suspending time by allowing for sex that doesn't have to end and for queer lives that no longer have to be haunted by AIDS, antiretrovirals suspend us in the present. Yet, drawing from Baraitser (2017), that suspension needs not be reduced to the anti-futurity of authors like Edelman. Rather, as an experiment with bodies and with what they may become, the experiences of a suspended present catalysed by antiretrovirals can allow us to veer away from all fixed, linear, and teleological futures, opening our bodies and lives – speculatively – to the potential of a future deprived of predetermined coordinates. Whilst, during the 1980s and 1990s, HIV and

AIDS diagnoses were experienced as life events which reframed one's life around the certainty of one's looming and painful death, antiretrovirals have expanded the sensed rhythms of the body, suspending them in chronicity. It is that psychosocial form of temporality – of felt, embodied, and lived time mediated by antiretrovirals and porn, and sometimes enhanced by recreational drugs consumed in sexual contexts – that comes across in the two ethnographic vignettes with which I started this article.

Focusing on antiretroviral time can help us further attend to the biopolitical complexities and doubleness of antiretroviral regimens as somatechnics, to how they hover between neoliberal temporal rationality and irrationality. On the one hand, antiretrovirals can be rightfully seen to strengthen the temporality of a neoliberal rationality whose subject is a self-administering, self-governing individual body responsible for increasing the efficiency of its life understood as a reservoir of human capital and labour power by means of regular self-calculations of risk and security. Furthermore, and as argued by Joshua Pocius (2016), the restricted accessibility of antiretrovirals as PrEP in the 'global North' bring forth 'a geocorpography of HIV in which certain geopolitically-constituted subjects are granted immunity from the potential risks harboured by pleasures of the flesh through the same logic which limits antiretroviral access for those who already require it' elsewhere (22). In so doing, they contribute to the 'transnationalization of suffering' that, Sousa Santos saw as the defining feature of the globalised 'North'/'South' divide ((2014: 10), with the hegemony and biopolitics of the 'North' being dependent on the (ongoingly colonial) necropolitics that mark the 'South' as its other (Mbembe 2003). Yet, on the other hand, and notwithstanding the ways in which PrEP may catalyse 'neoliberal sexual individualism' (Pocius 2016: 32), the actual ways in which it has been taken up in some specific subcultural contexts – weekend-long marathons of clubbing and/or condomless sex, for instance – complicate that reductive narrative by expanding *experiences* of antiretroviral time beyond the time of social reproductive futurism and of the reproduction of human and financial capital, towards the slower time of temporal suspension and recursion, of fucking both without reproduction and without

ending. In short, the chronicity of antiretroviral time thus lived may, when measured through the lens of the neoliberal rationality and logics of self-entrepreneurialism that nonetheless have given rise to it, be seen as an unproductive waste of time. By that account, if both liberalism and neoliberalism have depended on an increasingly strict rationalisation of time as profit, wasting time can become a path away from such overdetermining of bodies and lives. Most importantly however, and in my view, it can also become a kind of affirmative experimentation with alternative and queerer modes of self- and world-making that veer away from pre-existing understandings of what is a life and a corporeality worth living. If antiretroviral time, just like the time of chronicity discussed by Baraitser (2017), may be seen to reproduce the slow time of 21st-century capitalist violence and ecocide, a time when the end of the world is felt to have already started, it may also – it may still – carry within itself the seeds of its own demise. These latter can take the form of a lived, subjective experience of time that may challenge the enforced temporality of the neoliberal subject and its blind obsession with the future as that which will keep on delivering profit and personal growth. Antiretrovirals invite us to waste time by stopping and fucking a bit more.

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